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Sequences, Anti-Sequences, Cycles, and Composite Novels: The Short Story in Genre Criticism

Suzanne Ferguson

1 Several recent books and collections of criticism focusing on short story cycles or sequences suggest that there may be a renewed interest in this hybrid genre—in some sense oxymoronic, since the brevity and concentration of the short story are contravened by their assembly in a larger fictional entity. Although stories have historically been published in gatherings, in earlier centuries often with framing stories (the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Decameron),* the idea of a short story sequence or cycle as we currently think of it is basically a modernist (i.e., early 20th century) invention: Joyce called his *Dubliners* (finished 1907, published 1914) "a series of epicleti" that composed "a chapter of the moral history of [his] country" (*Dubliners* 259, 269), though George Moore may have beaten him to the punch in *The Untilled Field* (1903*)*; Sherwood Anderson and Faulkner wrote "classic" ones in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and *Go Down, Moses* (1941*)* and *The Unvanquished* (1938); Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923) is meant to be read as one (though it's not even all prose stories), as is Welty's *The Golden Apples* (1947). Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925, 1930, 1955) is more complicated, as Michael Reynolds has shown (see Kennedy, 35-51): although Hemingway spoke and wrote of it as a single entity, the interchapters relate to the stories by a perceptibly arbitrary association, and the stories themselves yield a pattern only with much good will and/or agility on the part of the reader. Yet even at the margins, these are all examples we would likely agree about: we know 'em when we see' em.

2 What formal characteristics, if any, make them sequences or cycles? Forrest Ingram's 1971 definition of a cycle is still widely used, still appropriate: "a short story cycle [is] a book of short stories so linked to each other *by their author* that the reader's successive experience on various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts" (19; my italics). Robert M. Luscher, in an

important 1989 article, defines the sequence: "A volume of stories, collected and organized *by their author*, in which *the reader* successively realizes underlying patterns of coherence by continual modifications of his perceptions of pattern and theme." He continues, "Within the context of the sequence, each short story is thus not a completely closed formal experience... The volume as a whole becomes an open book, *inviting the reader* to construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them cumulative thematic impact" (148; my italics). I will come back to some telling points in these definitions, notably that the author does the original linking and that the reader participates in the creation of the sequence or cycle.

3 Which is it? A cycle by its name should "go around" something—in time, in the consideration of a theme (returning to its point of origin?); a sequence should be linked by development (going from one place to another), whether in time or theme. The only reason for caring about whether a particular group of stories is a sequence or cycle is the same reason as for caring what genre anything is: so that the reader can bring to bear appropriate strategies for understanding the work, for "getting the most out of it." To illustrate some of the pitfalls in picking a term we might consider Kipling, a niche short story writer today, who was fond of using the same characters and settings, playing variations on his themes, in books like *Stalky & Co.* (1919) or *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1923). Indeed, one usually has to read several of these stories before they start to make sense, individually or as a group. Earlier, Kipling wrote more loosely grouped stories on such themes as work—working men and machines—in *The Day's Work* (1898), or the life of the English foot soldier in India, in *Soldier's Three* (1895, with other miscellaneous stories in the volume) almost as a heuristic to generate related stories. Some of the groups have a "forward" progress, others don't. In almost all his later volumes, Kipling gathers his stories under titles that suggest at the very least thematic juxtapositions: *Actions and Reactions* (1909), *Traffics and Discoveries* (1913), *Debits and Credits* (1926), *Limits and Renewals* (1932). (The title of *A Diversity of Creatures* [1917], on the other hand, foretells its miscellaneousness.) I bring them up because we don't often think of Kipling's books with the other modernist cycles, yet we need the tools of cycle reading to properly appreciate Kipling's art and understand his project.

4 On the other hand, Conan Doyle wrote the *Sherlock Holmes* stories with their repeating characters and themes (and plot formulae) not as sequences or cycles with an accretive structure (though the quest to kill off Holmes might be thought to generate a sequence in the Moriarty stories). With the Holmes stories, a group is not one "work," as many of the Kipling books are, but a convenient publishing unit, gathering individual stories previously published in magazines.

5 So why the current interest in sequences and cycles? And to what end? After Ingram, it was nearly two decades before the publication of Susan Garland Mann's *The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide* (1989), much of which is an annotated bibliography. J. Gerald Kennedy, following up his 1988 theoretical article, "Toward a Poetics of the Short Story Cycle," edited a collection of essays by himself and ten other critics, *Modern American Short Story Sequences* (1995), in which he switches terms (persuaded, he says, by Rob Luscher) from cycle to sequence. Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris's *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition* appeared the same year, aiming to supersede the cycle/sequence issue altogether.

6 Two big votes for "cycle" came in 2001 with Gerald Lynch's The One and the Many: English-Canadian Short Story Cycles and James Nagel's The Contemporary American

Short Story Cycle: the Ethnic Resonance of Genre. Lynch, sticking close to a mainstream position, adopts Forrest Ingram's basic definition and adds the useful proposition that "In addition to providing opportunities for a conventional exploration of place and character, the story cycle also offers formal possibilities that allow its practitioners the opportunity to challenge . . . the totalizing impression of the traditional novel of social and psychological realism" (17). Nagel likes "cycle" as a historical term going back to the Greek "Cyclic Poets" and the medieval English "cycle" plays (2; although it's not clear from his discussion who first applied the term "cycle" to those dramas). Rejecting the nods to author and reader of Ingram and Luscher, Nagel's rather retro formalist definition provides "that each contributing unit of the work be an independent narrative episode, and that there be some principle of unification that gives structure, movement, and thematic development to the whole" (2). Compare, however, Dunn and Morris's definition of the "composite novel": "a literary work composed of shorter texts that—though individually complete and autonomous—are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles" which they go on to extrapolate (2, in italics in the original). As far as a critically useful terminology is concerned, I want to suggest that these Nagel and the Dunn and Morris definitions represent a step backward from Ingram and Luscher.

7 The key word differentiating "cycle" from "novel" in Nagel is "independent," but I find it problematic in itself, since in a narratological sense, any episode that is a complete narrative (i.e., has a beginning, a middle, and an end) could be considered "independent," and there are countelss such episodes in novels. Dunn and Morris, who would claim many of the other critics' cycles and sequences as novels, also invoke the impressionistic "complete and autonomous" to describe the component internal narratives incorporated into their "composites." These definitions, in order to encompass all the works the critics want to write about, remain capacious and relatively vague. As one reads into these recent volumes, a disquieting sense arises that the idea of "sequence" or "cycle" or "composite novel" has been so broadly applied as to cover nearly any collection of stories (since after all, writers do work out their themes and vision from one story to another) or even works more usually or productively read as novels. In the case of Dunn and Morris, it also includes memoirs and other non-fiction or collections of fictions with essays, poems, polemics (Mary McCarthy's Memories of a Catholic Girlhood, W.E.B. Dubois' The Souls of Black Folk, and Leslie Marmon Silko's Storyteller, for examples). The categorization depends primarily not on what the author did but what the critic wants to do.

8 Is there not something alarming happening when genre criticism seemingly seeks to blur distinctions rather than to find them? A caveat that Dunn and Morris should have taken more seriously is their epigraph, from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: "When you coin a term, it ought to mark a real species, and a specific difference" (qtd. in Dunn and Morris, xi). We need to think harder about the usefulness of generic distinctions for reading in the area of stories that may be related in very different ways from book to book. To begin, let us reconsider some of the sequences we know: what makes *Dubliners* one? Possibly only Joyce's cryptic descriptions to his brother and his publishers, noted above; but he also indicated there were stories of childhood, youth, adulthood, and public life. He wrote additional stories to fill in the gaps to make the groups symmetrical. He used a long story to culminate all his themes and bring the sequence to its conclusion in "The Dead." And when challenged by his publisher, he refused to delete "objectionable" stories, so that one

printer notoriously melted down the type for the volume, and its appearance was delayed for seven years.

9 In *Winesburg, Ohio*, surely influenced by *Dubliners*, Anderson uses a recurrent principal character, George Willard, who is not in all the stories but whose development is a thread throughout, and whose departure from Winesburg is the culminating moment, the "way out" of the book. Yet George's presence is sketchy enough that no reader would mistake him for the protagonist of a novel. The other story protagonists of the volume share themes, and often are related in one way or another to each other and to George. Anderson's prologue, "The Book of the Grotesque," makes explicit the overall principle of organization, and sets the book off from other of his stories that could be easily considered to share the theme, "Death in the Woods," for example. It's rare for any of the Winesburg stories except "Hands" to be published apart from the volume (unlike several of the Joyce stories), because they do not stand very firmly on their own, even though they function well in the sequence and are recognizably "complete" in themselves.

10 Characters, familial and locale relations are strong in *Go Down, Moses*, showing development of the themes over several generations, and from several perspectives. *The Golden Apples* uses and reuses characters over two generations, yoking the book together despite shifts in style and even locale among the characters. Both Faulkner and Welty *designed* these sequences, and readers have over the years found pleasure in teasing out the connections among the stories. Yet all the stories have the structural features that make them seem to a reader independent and meaningful without the others: however—and the distinction is crucial—separately they mean something different from what they mean when read in the sequence where their authors published them..

11 If these are the touchstone modernist prototypes, then what are the new sequences? Perhaps the classic post-modern sequence/cycle is Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* (1969), whose subtitle—"Music for Print, Tape, and Live Voice"—signals its playful generic teasing. Although it appears at first as though there is no connection among the fables and realistic stories of the book, eventually it does become clear that all the stories are "about" the same character, at different life stages (starting "pre-conception") and seen through different technical perspectives. More recently, we might single out Robert Olen Butler's extraordinary act of imagination, social critique, and humane wisdom, *Tabloid Dreams* (1996).

12 But is it meaningful or fruitful to call some of these other books cycles or sequences when they behave in different ways? And we read them very differently from one to the next? Nagel challenges the usual designation of a number of books as "novels," including Djuna Barnes' avant garde *Nightwood* (1937) and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1989). While *Nightwood* was originally published in separate sections, I know no precedent for trying to see its parts as "independent episodes": indeed, it's usually viewed and taught as a primary example of the modernist "montage" novel, one of Joseph Frank's touchstones of "spatial form" (*see The Widening Gyre,* 25-49). Cisneros' book presents a more ambiguous test for genre identification, since its forty-four vignettes all have individual titles in the table of contents and on the spacious opening page of each one. Yet it seems equally if not more appropriate to Cisneros' gathering ("I collected those stories") to see the group as Maria Elena Valdés has, "lyrical reflections" (qtd. in Nagel, 108) that form a semi-autobiographical fictional "memoir" of the protagonist, Esperanza. What is gained by viewing them as a cycle? Granted, one can read individual chapters as independent wholes, and some of them are effective short stories, or

narrative prose poems, if you will. The kind of concentration on the individual piece that readers bring to bear on the more substantial stories of, for example, *Go Down Moses* or *The Golden Apples* (seven stories each) would be not just wasted but counterproductive with *The House on Mango Street*, whose many discrete pictures combine in a kind of narrative mural, the individual elements of which can be appreciated as separate but only interpreted in the aggregate. (Dunn and Morris correctly include the book as a composite novel unified by the voice of the narrator [49-50].)

13 Hertha Wong (in the Kennedy volume, 170-93) and James Nagel both have chosen to see Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) as a cycle, basing their arguments in the original magazine publication of ten of the fourteen original chapters. (Dunn and Morris see all Erdrich's books as "composite novels," though the distinction intended seems unnecessary.) In "The Short Stories of Erdrich's Novels" I demonstrated the differences in the way Erdrich presented some of her short stories in magazines from the ways she integrated them into her novels, *Love Medicine* and *Tracks* (1988). Her later novels dealing with the same characters that populate those books (and for that matter the novel that came between *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*, *The Beet Queen* [1986]) have also employed "stories" as chapters. *Tales of Burning Love* (1996) is a kind of post-modern *Decameron* in which the four wives of Jack Mauser, whose funeral they have just attended (though he is not really dead), tell their stories of him to keep awake and alive in a snowbound SUV. Although she doesn't publish *every* section of her novels separately any more, and although there is less shifting among narrators in some of the novels than others, virtually every Erdrich chapter *could* be read as a short story, with very little adaptation. However, I would contend that Erdrich's stories have become definite chapters, that is, integral parts of books that we read as novels, and moreover, parts of a vast, still unfolding saga that rivals Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels and stories, and that it's not only fairly pointless to try to read them as stories in a sequence, it's counterproductive, since what Erdrich is aiming for is the sweep of a panoramic vision of interconnected characters and intergenerational stories, where, as in Faulkner, "the past isn't dead, it's not even past."

14 On the other side of the scale, books with only some related stories have been critiqued as sequences or cycles. Sherman Alexie, another Native American writer, presents a problematic collection in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), which Rob Luscher analyzed as a sequence at the ALA Symposium on Native American Literature in November 1999. Among the twenty-two separate stories (some of which might better be called sketches or parables) of the book are nine or ten at most that narrate the youth of a figure Alexie calls "Victor Joseph," a contemporary Spokane Indian with two friends, Junior Polatkin and Thomas Builds-the-Fire. These same three characters, at a later point in their lives, are the main male characters in a novel, *Reservation Blues* (1994), where Thomas rather than Victor is the protagonist and primary focus of narration, and some of the chapters could easily be read as short stories. One of the longer stories of Victor in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is "This is what it means to say, Phoenix, Arizona," the basis of the screenplay of the movie "Smoke Signals" (1998) which adds to that story a love interest for the runaway father who has died in Phoenix, and works in some characters and episodes from other stories and from *Reservation Blues*, to create a fairly conventional "buddy" road picture with a full-fledged though slender plot, a film made by and with Indians. But the remaining dozen or so stories in the collection, although they take place on the "rez," explore other issues and voices, and I, at least, can't see how one *can* read them as a sequence leading to some final "cumulative" but

coherent "impact," other than the pervasive angry but compassionate irony with which Alexie treats his subjects, the down-and-outs of his reservation. (To be fair, Luscher doesn't say it has to be "coherent" –but if the "cumulative impact" is just a generalized emotion, nearly any collection of short stories by a single writer is going to be a "sequence."[1])

15 I would like to consider here briefly the possibility that there are collections or groups of stories that might usefully be considered anti-sequences: where there are stories that obviously *do* fit together, or *could* fit together in a sequential pattern, but whose authors have refused to put them together or allow them to be put together: Grace Paley's stories of Faith Darwin and her family are the most striking of these. Threaded throughout her three collections, from the late fifties through 1985, with a couple of separately published later pieces, these stories trace Faith's development from a relatively young, recently-divorced single mother of two boys, the daughter of Jewish immigrants to New York, through her late middle age, political activism, love affairs, trips to China and Puerto Rico, and the growing up of her sons. But Paley has revealed in interviews and conversations that when her publisher asked her to put them all together in a sequence, she adamantly refused! She was offended.[2] In her view, they are individual short stories, to be read basically independently and at random. She uses the continuing characters as a way to bring her customary readers quickly "up to speed." She knows Faith, and we know Faith. She can, as she has said, "employ" Faith for missions to stand in for the author herself (*Just as I Thought*, 125). Each story provides its own insights; one does not "depend" on any others, although sometimes the links are amusing, especially when lovers get exchanged sometime in "between" stories.

16 As I have written elsewhere, while she clearly has in the Faith stories the materials for a novel—or at least a sequence like Updike's *Olinger Stories* (1964) or Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are* (1978)[3]—Paley equally clearly rejects the concept as falsifying the issues that move her in contemporary life. As a feminist Jewish writer, Paley is an outsider with a special perspective on the dominant culture in which she lives, a culture crumbling from its own inconsistencies and inattention, a culture vulnerable to the guerrilla "warfare" of the Faith stories. Like other writers of these strangely hybrid, marginal works--stories interrelated but not physically linked in a "book"--, Paley senses herself to be in a position from which she can only tell the truth through a kind of deceptive acquiescence to the norms--of society and of writing. Indeed, in the Faith stories Paley appears to be trying to conceal herself in conventions of storytelling that she flouts at every turn, still refusing the temptation to create a sequence or a novel.

17 Similarly, I would say that Alexie resisted rather than succumbed to sequencing in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. After the nine stories of Victor Joseph, the constant shifting of perspectives over the last two-thirds of the volume buffets the reader with so many visions of painful confrontations between Indians, between whites and Indians, between the Indians and the culture both of the reservation and the "Union," that the ultimate effect or impact of reading it sequentially is potentially bewilderment, a sense of being pushed and pulled, beaten back and drawn into, these lives, with their multiplication or modification of anger through imagination into "survival," as Alexie gives the equation in "Imagining the Reservation"(149-53). As a collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a crazy quilt of stories, stories within stories, framed vignettes, exempla, dream visions and, in the one titled "Distances," futurist fabulation. One story "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor," has a protagonist–narrator,

Jimmy Many Horses (also called One Horse) who has cancer and a wife named Norma. Norma's youth, in the story, "Somebody Kept Saying Powow," is described by a narrator named Junior Polatkin. Junior always thought Norma would marry Victor, but he was too much of a bully (203). The stories share recurrent themes of betrayal, oppression, struggle for psychic survival and love, of alcoholism and other diseases, and often use basketball as a trope of power, stringing the volume together even as the fragmentary forms of the individual stories, and the montage-like conflicts of their juxtapositions, work to keep the reader from any comfortable sense of unity or resolution. [4]

18 I have suggested in papers on Paley and Alexie that their social situation, as "outsiders" by gender, ethnicity, or politics, encourages them to see the world, and their task as writers, as opposing closure. In his subtitle, "The Ethnic Resonance of Genre," James Nagel points to the related but different perspective he takes to some of the same issues: for him, the traces of oral tradition in American ethnic writers predispose them to write cycles instead of novels (255). Aren't there traces, though, of "oral" storytelling in virtually all fiction? And, on the other hand, have these writers not grown up in a tradition in which, as Bakhtin contends, the novel is the norm, attracting everything into its vortex?[5] Nagel's examples—besides *Love Medicine* and *The House on Mango Street*, they include Kincaid's *Annie John*, Alvarez' *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, and Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*[6]—are chosen precisely to challenge the designation of novel that has been assigned them. But these, and Nagel's others,—and two recent ones I've run across, Ivonne Lamazares' striking novel (it says so on the cover) of growing up in and escaping from Cuba, *The Sugar Island* (2000), and Fran Zell's *The Marcy Stories* (2001, which says stories in the title but seems very like an autobiographical novel)—depend for their "genre" on conditions that ultimately cannot be shown to be formal, but rather intentional (the author's) and responsive (the reader's "genre memory"). I would like to note here also the "other stories" of Vijay Lakshmi's (recently published) *Pomegranate Dreamsand Other Stories*, which presents characters whose names and situations recur tantalizingly, while the volume as a whole remains a collection rather than a sequence or cycle.

19 There are two nodes of attention that keep surfacing as one reads the recent criticism of sequence and cycle (and "composite novel"): what *authors* have "intended" for the structures of their works, and what *readers* do, how in reading they "frame" works to better construct the relations of parts to wholes. I think, for our part, we critics had better give some deference to the authors, and plenty of leeway to readers. It's fine to see things from different perspectives, and judge what new insights shifting frames gives us—after all, academic careers depend on it—but let's keep a little humility and admit that's what we're doing. It's very possible to read *A Portrait of the Artistas a Young Man* and even *Ulysses* as short story cycles, just as it's possible to read miscellaneous volumes of stories—as Susan Donaldson reads Welty's *The Wide Net*, or Susan Garland Mann reads O'Connor's *Everything that Rises Must Converge*, or Robert Luscher reads *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*—as cycles or sequences. But let's be clear that these are heuristics for generating new interpretations, not "realities" that need to be proven and believed.

20 Gerald Lynch's book, *The One and the Many,* does generally respect boundaries: by dealing only with books sanctioned by their authors as cycles or sequences (whether expressly or tacitly) he can more reliably demonstrate the development of the cycle in English Canada, and show its peculiar, attractive qualities as a modern (and post-modern) hybrid genre. On the other hand, the Dunn and Morris volume, *The Composite Novel*, in attempting to

gather in such works as Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* or Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, the former of which is only a novel by dint of ignoring virtually every canonical feature of "novel," and the latter of which is recognizably a novel with recipes, proves counterproductive. While they have useful things to say about "collective protagonists" (chapter 5, 59-73) and about different kinds of metaphoric patterning (chapter 6, 74-87), their wide net does not allow them to make meaningful discriminations between "real" novels and short story sequences. In almost every case, their individual analyses could be deepened and enriched by attention to differences between works composed of genuine short stories, arranged for sequence, and episodic, fragmentary novels with multiple "stories" within them. For them, for example, there is no *generic* difference among Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, H.D.'s *Palimpsest*, and Michael Dorris's *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water,* all of which happen to be (independent) narratives about three women: but Dorris's book is a novel and the other two aren't, and we read them, consequently, in very different ways. Or we should.

21 Trying to assimilate short story sequences (or earlier collections that have some cycle-like characteristics such as Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* or Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*) into "novels" seems to me to be almost perverse, since it opens the term "novel" to encompass virtually any fiction between its own hard (or soft) covers, [7] and thus cancels any assistance the generic categorization can give to the reader as an interpreter. Readers come to novels with very different expectations of the reading experience than they bring to short stories or non-fiction, and calling the latter "novel" could hardly be helpful. This is Bakhtin's notion that the novel draws everything into itself as self-fulfilling prophecy!

22 But perhaps the critical activity points to another phenomenon we are striving to come to grips with, a perception that the novel itself has so fully assimilated the principle of "epiphany"—so central to the modernist short story—that many, perhaps even most novels, could now be seen to be in some sense assemblages of short stories: Woolf's "matches struck in the dark." That so many post-modern novels find their way into Dunn and Morris's bibliography would suggest such a development. Similarly, Nagel's wish to read as short story cycles a number of books that others would see as post-modern novels also suggests (and with greater interpretive possibility) that might be the case. In fact, it might be instructive to make a list of recent novels that *aren't* made up of stories, and figure out what they have in common structurally.

23 In the case of short story collections that are critiqued as cycles or sequences, as Luscher would read *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, we are seeing the other side of the coin: the tendency to accretion within the work of a writer, as the writer struggles with his or her "material," so often individual life experiences. Having devoted nearly forty years to thinking about the short story and what makes a short story a special kind of artistic event, I would like to plead for resistance to all three tendencies, or at least that they be bracketed as special readings "against the grain" for the purpose of seeing new elements in the works. Before we get into mis-categorizing works containing short stories, I would like to see *more* attention rather than less to the special aspects of the short stories as stories, respecting the intentions of the authors (where evident), and helping readers rather than getting in their way. What does it take to have enough continuity, coherence, or development for a narrative to be read as a story or novel, and what differences in reading experience or interpretation do we register with sequences or cycles? Why do some writers avoid sequencing their related stories, and why do readers

apparently like to make them into sequences regardless? These and other related questions need to be addressed as we pursue the elusive issues of genre in books of short stories, not because we need convenient pigeonholes but because we need to understand how formal concerns influence interpretation.

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NOTES

1. Alexie's recent collection, *To ghest Indian in the World* (2000) also seems to me "just" a collection, with some fine stories that are close to those in *The Lone Ranger*... and others that seem simply calculated or intended to be shocking and open the issue of "gay" or "queer" Indian or white/Indian relations, stories that are too often just heavy handed, in-your-face didactic.
2. Conversation with the a thor, March 27, 1999, Angers, France.

3. The former arranged by the a thor after prior separate publication, the latter rearranged and edited while the book was already in galleys!

4. Looking backward for earlier examples of resistant (or recalcitrant) collections, we might consider one early group of stories that may or may not be a sequence: Katherine Mansfield's group of stories about her family that includes "Prelude" and "At the Bay" (1918, 1921) but also "The Doll House" (1922) and several others. There is a good deal of evidence in letters that Mansfield wanted to write a novel using this material, but that, due to her health or her "vision" of the world—like Paley's and Alexie's—the "plot" was irretrievably ruptured and fragmented, and that novel or even "sequence" was far too comforting an illusion for her to impose on her readers.

5. This Bakhtininan notion is developed in *The Dialogic Imagination*, as Lynch points out in his introduction (14).

6. Not surprisingly, every one of Nagel's titles appears in Dunn and Morris's annotated bibliography of "composite novels."

7. The works that are not fiction, or only partly fiction, such as *The Souls of Black Folk*, I think we can summarily rule out.

ABSTRACTS

Le terme short story cycle s'applique à un recueil de nouvelles qui tient aussi du roman. Dans cet article, nombre d'ouvrages critiques récents consacrés à ce genre y sont discutés. Selon Forrest Ingram, l'élément essentiel du short story cycle est l'intentionnalité de son auteur. Selon Robert Lucher (qui, lui, préfère le terme de « séquences ») ce genre se définit par l'« impression d'effets cumulatifs » qu'il produit chez le lecteur. Appliquées aux ouvrages récents de James Nagel – Contemporary American Short Story Cycle: the Ethnic Resonance (2001)– et de Maggie Dunn et Ann Morris –The Composite Novel: the Short Story Cycle in Transition (1995)–, ces considérations plus anciennes montrent que notre compréhension du short story cycle n'a pas beaucoup évolué depuis. Loin d'affiner la définition du short story cycle, ces ouvrages rendent les lignes de partage entre roman, short story cycle et recueil moins nettes qu'elles ne l'avaient été jusqu'alors. Considérer des romans comme Nightwood de Djuna Barnes ou The House on Mango Street de Sandra Cisneros, ainsi que le propose Nagel, comme des short story cycles, rendrait leur interprétation plus difficile. Il en est de même pour The Way to the Rainy Mountain de N. Scott Momaday et de Country of the Pointed Firs de Sarah Orne Jewett que Dunn et Morris définissent comme des « romans composites ». Bref, il serait regrettable, pense l'auteur, à ce que l'on tente à tout prix de voir un short story cycle derrière tout recueil de nouvelles. Finalement, l'auteur propose le terme d'« anti-sequences » pour définir une autre catégorie de nouvelles, et l'illustre en s'appuyant sur l'œuvre de Grace Paley. C'est l'intentionnalité de l'auteur, l'impression d'effets cumulatifs et la relation d'interdépendance entre nouvelles du même recueil que l'on devrait encore étudier pour mieux cerner les enjeux du short story cycle.

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Suzanne Ferguson has retired from teaching at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. She is the author of numerous articles on the history and theory of the short story. Her recent work has concentrated on groups of inter-related stories, some of which she finds to be "anti-sequences". She also publishes on the American poet, Randall Jarrell, and is the editor of the recently published *Jarrell, Bishop, Lowell & Co.: Middle-Generation Poets in Context* (University of Tennessee Press, 2003).